RODIN, WORLD FAMOUS SCULPTOR, LAUDS GREEK ART

Great Master Insists That Student Who Loves Women Too Passionately Is Lost, No Matter How Great His Genius—Says He Is Just the Opposite of Enthusiasm and That His Sculpture Is Great Because Mathematically Correct

Auguste Rodin

Bust of Harriman

Portrait Bust of Mrs. I.W.S., New York.

Auguste Rodin, Sketching Children

Portrait Bust of an American.

By HERMAN BERNSTEIN.

JUST as I was leaving Paris the postman handed me a letter from Auguste Rodin, the world's greatest sculptor, containing an invitation to visit him in his studio on the following afternoon. My grips were in the automobile and I was on my way to the railroad station. I had made arrangements to meet a distinguished German immediately after my arrival in Berlin. Instead of going to the railroad station I telegraphed to Berlin that I would come a few days later and I remained to meet Rodin.

A gifted painter and keen art critic who was with me said:

"I hope you are not hesitating. I would give up a dozen other important engagements for a meeting with the Michelangelo of modern times. Besides Rodin is 72, and there is only one Rodin."

I was not hesitating. I remembered the great pleasure I had derived from my meeting with the vigorous, intellectual seventy-one-year young genius of France.

At 2 o'clock I came to the studio where the greatest masterpieces of the famous French sculptor have been produced and where they are still produced.

Before meeting the master I met his muse. Rodin's muse is a brilliant New York woman who is now the Duchess de Choiseul. The Duchess, whom I met the year before in Rodin's studio, told me that Rodin regarded her as his muse. She showed the bust he was making of her representing "laughter," and she declared that Rodin considered it his masterpiece. The bust was not complete at the time.

"Has M. Rodin completed the bust of his muse?" I asked the Duchess as she came out and assured me that the great sculptor would soon return to the studio.

"That was a most unfortunate affair. A number of accidents happened to that bust before it was completed and finally when it was ready and was to be shipped to the exhibition another accident occurred and the work was destroyed. That bust was one of the very finest works of the master. But he is working on a new bust."

Saying this she removed the cloth from an incomplete bust of herself, her face laughing broadly.

"I am afraid that this one is not such a happy likeness of me," she added with a smile. "I am almost sure that no accidents will happen to this bust."

Then the muse commenced to speak with enthusiasm about Rodin's great success everywhere in Europe, in America, and especially in France.

"Rodin has just returned from Lyons," she said. "He has loaned to the city of Lyons his private collection of about two hundred and fifty of his favorite drawings for the exhibition. All the rooms and the salon are brilliantly illuminated and the impression made by the Rodin exhibition there is one that can never be forgotten. The surroundings and the atmosphere are so delightful, and the works of the master seem to be moving and going around. It is a gigantic exhibition."

Then she repeated to me how she had persuaded Mr. Ryan, who had his bust made by Rodin, to immortalize himself by creating a Rodin gallery in America.

"After you are dead, what will you amount to with all your millions?" she said to Mr. Ryan. "Why shouldn't you do something for the art of your country? Why shouldn't you do something for the young men and young women who cannot afford to come here to study? Why shouldn't you buy some of the best of Rodin's works and present them to the American people?"

These words, addressed by Rodin's muse to the American millionaire, induced him to start the Rodin collection at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

The Duchess also spoke of how she is continually urging Rodin to keep on working.

"He is getting older and the world cannot afford to lose the masterpieces which he is still able to produce," she said smiling.

Then she spoke about the numerous people who are disturbing Rodin with various requests, thus robbing him of his precious time.

"There are some who come here in the hope of getting souvenirs," she said, "and if they do not get any they are quite ready to steal them. Sometimes I feared that a crank might attack the master. I have been planning how to guard M. Rodin against such people. Now we have solved this question. I have secured a wonderful police dog to watch Rodin. People with criminal tendencies had better beware of that dog. Honest people of course need not fear him. But now that we have that dog here I feel that the master is safe. There was never a more intelligent bodyguard nor a more loyal one."

The muse spoke of the master tenderly.

Finally Rodin came in. His short stature, his left shoulder somewhat lower than his right, the deep furrows on his face might disillusion his admirer at the first glance, but as soon as Rodin begins to speak and his eyes brighten you see before yourself the genius. You realize that the enormous struggles and hardships and disappointments he had experienced before he could gain recognition had imprinted those deep wrinkles on his face, on his fine forehead. And you feel, above all, the deep, sincere note in all he says. And you also feel that, unlike many great artists, he knows how to say things effectively.

Rodin is very modest. Several years ago, when he visited England for the first time, this modesty of the famous French sculptor assumed an amusing aspect. He was invited to London. A deputation of prominent artists and a representative of the King went out to meet him in Dover and to greet him as he stepped upon English soil. A special car was in readiness to take the master to London; but the deputation failed to find Rodin. Finally they noticed him entering a third class car carrying a huge valise.

He was taken to the special car. In London a banquet was given in his honor. A great number of celebrities were present. One of them delivered a speech in English which seemed to make a profound impression. Rodin did not understand a word of it. As the speaker referred to the greatest sculptor in the world, who was among them, and all applauded enthusiastically Rodin also applauded, for he did not know whom the people were applauding.

I asked M. Rodin whether he would not care to say something to the American people, among whom his works are beginning to attract much attention.

The great sculptor answered:

"The American nation has created a Rodin Museum at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Being now a part of the Metropolitan Museum it may increase and grow in time. The Rodin Museum, I understand, is now visited by many working people, by artisans and students. This pleases me immensely. I think that such museums render great services and are very useful, for I notice that in all countries in Europe and in America efforts are now being made to restore art to its former place. Until recently art has been declining.

"The trouble is that among the students of art there are many who are not seriously devoting themselves to the study of art; there are so many idlers and nobles who pose as art students. I therefore have more confidence, and I expect real results from the actual apprentices. These have more courage, more perseverance; they make more serious efforts, and they want to make progress and accomplish ever better results. And that is what we need nowadays. We must try to find again the energy that art students had in former days. Such energy is still to be found in those working for the progress of science. But among the students of art this energy has been declining.

"The fine arts must go on developing with the greatest sincerity. Sincerity should always be the keynote of all works of art. Art brings happiness into life, for it is for the most part a rational admiration of nature.

"Art is like religion. And the best religion is that which gives happiness at the smallest cost, almost without money, for after all the different ways of happiness are chiefly intellectual.

"It is upon such principles as this that one realizes the beautiful productions of art which have come down to us from the great epochs in the past. Sincerity in the admiration of nature has brought us all great masterpieces of all times. The finest architectural works, the finest sculptures are those suggested by beauties of nature, and the finest adornments of architecture are made of the graceful body of woman. This I have been trying to explain in my works."

Speaking of his own methods of work, M. Rodin said:

"As I have stated before, I believe that art requires first of all patience and perseverence. Nowadays the young people want to make progress in the arts too quickly. They do not even find the time for learning to know themselves. The young people are striving for originality, or what they believe to be originality, and they hasten to imitate it. Forced originality, like the bizarre, has no reason for existence.

"A real artist builds his artistic work upon nature. Only after he has done that can he infuse his own temperament into the work. Many young artists will go to a museum and examine quickly a number of works of art, and then they will say to themselves, 'Now we have found ourselves, we have discovered our souls, we will create something new.' It may be that they really have souls, but these souls are the souls of thieves.

"We must try to do the very best we are able to do. We cannot become perfect artists within a few days. Artists need an enormous deal of patience. And they must work hard. Nothing can be achieved without hard work. If an artist is hasty, if he is hurrying to accomplish something, if he does not regard his work as its own end, if he thinks only of the success that will come to him as a result of his work, if he thinks only of the money he will get for his work, of the honors that may be showered upon him, of the orders he will secure, the artist is at an end, he will never accomplish anything really worthy.

"Such people will never be artists. They may make things that will appeal to the masses because these things will be mediocre, they will stoop to the lower taste of the masses and to their short sighted intelligence. But they will never be real artists. And how easy it is for an artist to go astray. The artist who loves women too passionately is lost.

"You cannot serve two passions at the same time; you cannot serve art and woman at the same time. And yet it has always been the opinion that artists derive their inspiration from the fire of love. Inspiration! Oh, that is an old, romantic idea which is devoid of any meaning. According to that old idea a youth of 20 is smitten with an inspiration to create a marble statue, to build it out of the delirium of his imagination at night. This is nonsense.

"Artists do not love their work if they do not understand it. All that is done in haste and in a state of excessive exaltation should be destroyed. Lombroso and others who imagine that genius borders on insanity are absolutely wrong. Genius is order personified, the concentration of the abilities and level mindedness of the masses. My work has often been styled the product of inspiration and exalted enthusiasm. I am just the opposite of an enthusiast.

"My temperament is even. I am not a dreamer. I am rather a mathematician. My sculpture is good because it is geometrically correct. I do not deny that I am emotional in my work, but that is only because my emotion is aroused by the beauties of nature which I am reproducing. I admire nature and I find it so perfect that if God called me and asked me to suggest a change I would answer: 'All is perfect. Nothing should be changed!'

"People have often accused me of having made erotic sculptures. I have never made any erotic works. I have never made a sculpture for the sake of the erotic element. Most of the people cannot conceive this because they are unable to conceive what sculpture is, because they are forever looking in sculpture for literary and philosophical ideas. Sculpture is the art of forms.

"I have created human bodies in various forms, in various natural forms. Nature is always beautiful. If nature sometimes appears to us ugly it is simply because we do not understand it. And what a great number of artists are deforming nature by trying to interpret it!"

"Have you noticed any new tendencies in art that show any promise?" I asked.

"I think that we are becoming more sincere and I hope that our epoch will be marked by a growing sincerity, for all our hope and the future of art depend upon sincerity.

"Much is being said about various new schools in art, about the 'Futurists' and others. But these do not exist. All these new styles and fads are devoid of any power. They are paradoxes."

"If you were asked to give a few rules of advice to young sculptors, what would you suggest to them?" I asked.

"First of all, I must recommend study. We must study hard and be sincere. We must learn to admire nature, and admire the Greeks, who were in this respect sincerer than all of us. We must copy them—or rather no, not copy them, that would be bad. We should introduce the same sincerity and the same methods of the Greeks into our different arts. In modelling a Dutch woman we can employ the methods of the Greek. The Greek power of modelling would be successful even if the subject be an American woman. It is the form and the sincerity and the power of modelling that have made Greek art so perfect."

I asked Rodin to mention the names of his favorite authors who influenced his life.

"The Romans, the Greeks, Dante and Shakespeare," replied the French sculptor.

Toward the end of the interview, M. Rodin said the following about the feminist movement:

"There is something very good in their campaign. They want to have men understand and appreciate that they possess a value. They want to demonstrate to men that there is some value in women which men lose by not understanding them. The suffragettes are only trying to prove their value. Man has weakened in the course of his work of research and eager quest for money, while women have in the meantime become superior to men in their love."

CULTIVATION OF THE READING HABIT

Reading is a habit and a very valuable one. For the wings of print and dreams lift a man from whatever is hard and sordid in his own life out into the world filled with the people he would like to know. And if he knows the world and the usages of good society, if only in books, he will be ready for whatever changes fortune may bring. Benjamin Franklin, the son of a candle maker, became so much a man of the world through the books that he read in the little printing office where he worked that he made a most successful Ambassador at the court of France, the most cultivated and punctilious in Europe.

So the moments that Charlie and Ethel spend curled up in a big chair with a book are not wasted. True, Ethel could put in several hours of practising while she is helping to work out Polly Oliver's problem, and Charlie might be playing baseball instead of with Roosevelt in Africa. But they are acquiring a taste for reading that will be infinitely useful as well as restful in after life. Straight up through fairy tales and adventure stories, through novels, the stories of how people live, to history and biography, the records of people who have lived, the trail into the enchanted country leads.

But the ability to identify oneself with a book must be acquired while the imagination is yet plastic and vivid. It cannot be slipped on at 20 or 30 like a new coat. Therefore some of the long hours of the summer vacation, when there is time for all the things that school crowds out, should be given over to reading. The mother who does not see the use of books cannot deny that she would like to. And admitting that she herself has missed the opportunity she should allow her child to find it.

Where books are rare cheap novels and detective stories must be guarded against, but the child who has plenty of good wholesome fairy stories and children's books will seldom choose them. Where there is a public library the Alcott books, the Trowbridge stories and other childish classics are easily obtainable. The Henty books with their historic inaccuracies and the Elsie books with their impossibly good little heroines are not to be recommended, but better these than nothing! Discrimination will come with time.

And as the taste for reading develops there comes an infinite patience for the reading of the classics. A child should know something of Dickens, of Cooper, and even of Shakespeare by the time he is 15. The hurry of later life may crowd them out to his great loss, since they wrote for the days when a book was a feast and not a hasty bite at a lunch counter. So they have gravitated to those leisure years when play days are almost past and duty days not yet begun.

The boy or girl in whom the habit of reading is strong lives the years from fifteen to eighteen mentally and not physically. There may be plenty of football and skating mixed with the reading and studying, but it is free from self-consciousness. And the girl who lives these years as a sort of Indian summer of childhood and defers the putting up of her hair and the love affairs until she is older may well count them the happiest of her life. Eighteen is young enough for her to begin to go to dances, or for her brother to spend his evenings away from home.

Ethel may not continue to read the classics. She probably turns from them to tales of society in New York or England. Many Ethels never get any further than that, as an examination of the list of best sellers readily proves. A few years of tarrying there will not harm her and a knowledge of how Evelyn Van Vroom manages her affairs of the heart may even be of service.

But to the man or the woman who loves reading for its own sake there will come sooner or later the enjoyment of the book not only for the story but for the way in which it is written, a feeling for the words themselves.

It is surprising how dependent we are, even those of us who have had most opportunity for observing life at first hand, upon the books we read. We get our ideals of life and conduct, even our methods of speech, so largely from them that the man who is not a reader is at a pitiful disadvantage. The great crises of life do not wait upon experience and they cannot be solved by instinct. And when we gropingly work out the thing to do it is based not on our worldly wisdom, but on the attitude toward life of the people whom we have known and admired in books.

So the mother who does not encourage her child in that love of books which can be cultivated in all children deprives him of one of life's compasses as well as a talisman by which he may choose his friends.

For the boy who is used to good company in books will not care long for the other sort in life. And all that his mother cannot hope to impress on him by precept she may encourage him to learn from example in the books he reads.

If she could give him a bottle of magic medicine which would open his eyes to his own faults, teach him what to do under all circumstances and provide him with rest and amusement whenever he needed it she would hardly deny it to him. But a book, or rather the reading of books, is all these—a friend, a guide, a panacea and ours for the taking down from the shelf, provided only we begin while we still have to stand on a chair.

While many of the old time so-called "blood and thunder" dime novels may have been justly considered not the proper reading for boys, it is a fact nevertheless that those who read them—either openly or surreptitiously—acquired a command of the English language grammatically constructed that months of forced and irksome study would not have brought to them. Of ten thousand boys who may have devoured Indian tales, the percentage of those who became inflamed and started West to kill the "redskin" was about as one to the ten thousand, and he never came to harm. A deeply imbedded desire for books, however, was cultivated by the ten thousand that was pretty certain to last through life.